David Lifton/Kerry Thornley, Harold Weisberg 5/20/93
re some materials in Sylvia Meagher's "Documents and People" folder (4C)

In the course of the hasty skimming to determine whether that file should be copied in response to Roger Feinman's request I spotted my name in the attached ~~mertaisl~~ material and without reading them had copies made. That was yesterday. Reading them today I am reminded by the first I've read, the Lifton letter to Arnold Levine, In Tampa, FL, of 5/21/68 (I presume Kerry Thornley's lawyer), I am reminded again of Lifton's utter irrespondible, his professional incompetence, his determination to make all the trouble possible for others, and his unending jumping to unwarranted conclusions that come only from his exalted self-concept and ignorance. Which he has no interest in correcting.

The background for this, and I would prefer no distribution for a while because it can reflect unfairly on Thornley, Lifton's chum of that era and earlier, is that the purpose was the exact opposite of the one that from his self-conceived omniscience Lifton ~~made~~ made up. There should be much more than I now recall that is relevant on file.

When Garrison's chief investigator, Louis Ivon, learned I was about to go and interview the late Douglad Jones, then of the Jones Printing Co., whoch printed the leaflets Oswald distributed, Ivon asked two things of me. One that I take the man who Garrison had hired as a non-city employee, "Bill Boxley," with me, and that I make a clandestine tape of the interview. In return he said he's send us with a driver, a detective, in an unmarked car. I'd never made a clandestine tape of any interview and was not equipped to do that. Ivon gave me a Samsonite attache case with one of the ~~realy~~ early casssette tape recorders in it, a Norelco. It was a primitive and an inadequate rig. There was no way of turning it on or off other than by opening the attache case, which would have disclosed it. Having no real choice, when the car stopped near Jones' place of business I turned the machine on. From then until the end of that side of the tape I had only 30 minutes. Boxley did and said nothing and I had also to carry my own and very heavy attache case. I feared it would look suspicious, having two attache cases one of which I did not open.

But Jones was able to stop what he was doing and we were not interrupted. My sole purpose in speaking to him, as the Warren Commission did not, was to ask him about that print job and the man who left the order and/or picked it up.

I had a real fistful of pictures, probably about 100 of them from all around the country, including a number of police mug shots one of which was of Oswald. I told Jones that if he believed that after the passing of all that time he felt he could not make a positive identification would he please indicate any picture or pictures that most closely resembled the man who either placed the order or picked the finished job up.

His small print shop was a short distance down the street from the Reily Coffee Co., where Oswald worked briefly the late spring and early summer of 1963. The building was since destroyed for a reconstruction of the area, including a new federal building. Jones later

drowned in Hurricane Camille, when he was down on the Gulf coast.

Jones selected as I now recall four different picture of Kerry W. Thornley, who had served briefly in the same Marines unit in which Oswald was, as I now recall at Santa Ana, CA, near San Diego, while Oswald was being discharged over his phony claim to his mother's need for him to support her. (Instead he left on the trip that ended in the USSR.)

In one of those pictures Thornley had a beard but Jones nonetheless selected that picture, too. He rejected the New Orleans police mug shots of Oswald.

I question him about his selection and he persisted in the belief that those different pictures of Thornley most closely resembled the man who picked the leaflets up.

When we got back to the office Boxley disputed that Jones had selected only Thornley of all those pictures as the man who most closely reeembled the man who picked that job up. When he persisted in the lie I got the tape and gave it to Ivon. He played it and Boxley apologized. Ivon asked to keep the tape and then it suffered a mysterious disappearance.

In one of those pictures, without a beard and I think the clearest of them, Thornley's part was on the side of the head, opposite the picture of Oswald. One possibility is that the negative was printed backward. In any event, with the hairline and part possibly important, the importance including exculpating Thornley, I wanted to compare the two pictures, with that of Thornley reversed to have the part on the same side of the head Oswald did in the picture being compared.

I should, I think, note that I regard Thornley as a bad person. Before going farthur with this Lifton stupdity and incompetence I state that what Jones told me indicated I should make some investigation of Thornley. In the course of it I obtained originals of some very nasty self-disclosures in letters he had written. In one, for example, he boasted of almost pushing both eyes out of the head of a man who had protested Thornley's abuse of a young woman. He was not bright as well as not nice, with crazy political and other beliefs.

Particularly after that experience with Boxley and the mysterious disappearance of that tape from the chief investigator's office, I was uneasy about getting Garrison's photographer to do the job. Because I knew Fred Newcomb I decided to write him. I asked Ivon if he had a free typewriter because my handwriting is illegible. He did not but he told me to dictate what I wanted to ask Newcomb to a pool secretary, Lorraine LeBoeuf. Ivon know what I was going to ask Newcomb.

I left and the next thing I knew Lorraine gave me a copy of what she had mailed to Newcomb. She had written that memo on the DA's letterhead, not plain paper.

As I now recall I did not tell Newcomb the reason I wanted the hairlines reversed but I think I did tell him it was for purposes of comparison with the Oswald picture.

The next thing I knew Lifton had launched a false and defamatory compaign in the Los Angeles undeground press. Nobody else cared about it and it was silly and false as he

told the story.

This letter to Thornley's lawyer is one in which Lifton undertakes ~~the~~ to tell the lawyer what he should do and in which he seeks to make himself important, without the slightest knowledge of what was intended and yet makes serious false charges ~~of~~ about it in public.

I note that in Lifton's 5/9/68 he keeps refering to my wanting Newcomb to "alter" the pictures for sinister purpose. What I did want to know is did Thornley look like Oswald or could he be made to look like him. I have no recollection of any earlier letters about this on my own letterhead and it is not important enough to take the time to see.

Later that year Garrison developed an interest in my Jones interview of which the tape disappeared from the chief investigator's office, one of the reasons for my apprehension especially with Boxley, in whom I had no confidence at all, involved. By then Jones had been closed up by the redelopment taking his property. But his former secretary/assistant, Myra Silver, asked him to her home in Metarie, almost part of New Orleans but in the next parish, Jefferosn, and Andrew (Moo)Sciambra, the most junior of the assistant district attorneys and the one with whom Garrison spent most time, went along. He drove us in his car.

Using my own tape recorded and this time keeping the tape I interviewed both together and separately, and each went over the same pictures, ~~that~~ independnely.

Both selected the same picture of Thornley as the one most closely resembling the man who picked those leaflets up and both were firm in insisting that it had not been Oswald. Lying before them they were quite familiar with Oswald's picture, as the whole world was.

It was and remains incredible to me that Garrison did nothing to try to investigate that any more than Brady, especially because he had charged Thornley with perjury. They were not really competent in that kind of investigation, although I have no reason to doubt that the professional police investigators assigned to Garrison's office were not competent in normal police matters.

So the matter remains unresolved and it may be that the crazy, uninformed and wrong-headed Lifton intrusion may be what tipped the scale and suggested to Garrison that he could expect more public complaint if he did investigate Thornley with this Lifton fabricated propaganda that Thornley was being framed and that I had misrepresented msyself as on Garrison's staff.

From what I know of Thornley, getting involved with Oswald in something that could create a stir might be attractive to him. On the other hand, he testified that once he red-baited Oswald at Santa Ana, Oswald had nothing more to do with him.

HW